

MOUNTAINLAND

Taking Business a Little Higher

By Grace Wall Conlon

Dynamic growth is driving the Mountainlands region of Utah to extraordinary new economic heights, and current achievements and future plans for Utah, Summit and Wasatch counties are drawing considerable attention to this part of the Beehive State.

Economic planning is becoming a top priority for elected and appointed officials in Utah's Mountainland, as they work to design community development projects that provide the bedrock for healthy growth. Richard Bradford, director of economic development in Pleasant Grove, a community on the cusp of an eruption of development, is deeply involved in shepherding his city through the complex growth paths.

Bradford comments on an acronym that surfaced in the days before the 2002 Olympic games came to Utah: G.R.O.W. Get the world to visit Utah; Roll out the red carpet; Open their eyes to all Utah has to offer; Work with them on making it happen.

"It was a good acronym," says Bradford. "The Olympics brought the world to our doorstep." According to Bradford, the 2002 Olympics accomplished the first step by showcasing our state. But that was only the beginning.

Plans for new convention centers and hotels are ongoing for the second step in G.R.O.W. Detailed, specific strategies for achieving sensible, profitable growth are being developed by city planners in all major Mountainlands cities. These plans have the support of the Mountainlands Association of Governments' futurists in determining needs for transportation and utilities, which flow across all three counties.

Bradford describes the planned Grove Convention Center, which broke ground in 2007 as "a lifestyle center" that should be completed in March 2009. A 116,000-square-foot convention center anchors this new complex, which will feature several restaurants offering diverse cuisine options.

Also included in the plan is a 5-star 320-room Embassy Suites hotel. A 38,000-square-foot ballroom with banquet seating for 2,700 will be able to

FAST FACTS:

Counties: Utah, Summit, Wasatch

Major Cities: Provo (115,135), Orem (89,713) Pleasant Grove (29,376), Heber (9,147), Park City (8,066)

Regional Civilian Labor Force: 232,139

Per Capita Income: \$21,576 (Utah), \$52,981 (Summit), \$423,632 (Wasatch)

Major Employers: Brigham Young University, Wasatch County School District, BackcountryStore.com, RMD Management, Novell, Convergys, Nestles USA Prepared Foods, Deer Canyon Resort Company, The Canyons, Wal-Mart

Average Sale Price of Homes, Year End 2006:

Utah-\$260,445; Park City area-\$952,175; Wasatch-\$372,829

accommodate major events. A second 220-room hotel is in the planning stage for this convention site; it is scheduled for completion in September 2010.

Like Pleasant Grove, the city of Lehi in Utah County has an ambitious vision for its Point of the Mountain mixed-use project, which sits just south of the Salt Lake County-Utah County border. According to developer Brandt Andersen, the planned project will include a 5-star hotel and arena, retail space with a large restaurant component, office space and residential housing. The complex is

being designed by internationally renowned architect Frank Gehry. A 45-story hotel will be the tallest building in Utah, and two man-made lakes on this 85-acre site will be open to wake boarding and water skiing.

Further south, Provo City is looking to new development and redevelopment to keep pace with all the other action in Utah County. The city has retained the nationally known consulting firm Economic Research Associates (ERA) to do a complete market analysis for the redevelopment of downtown Provo. "We want to look at it from both a conservative



GROVE CONVENTION CENTER

and an aggressive perspective," says Dixon Holmes, assistant director of economic development. The aim, he says, is to preserve the historic quality of downtown—with its charming, historic Main Street—while providing a rejuvenated center for retail, commercial and community activities.

Provo continues to serve as the center of commerce for the county and is home to Brigham Young University, the largest privately-owned university in the United States. With its highly-ranked Marriott School of Management and modern campus, the school owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints boasts nearly 30,000 students, earning bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in 277 different programs.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Utah County is the most densely populated of the three counties, which are each growing dramatically. Current U.S. Census projections for the three counties indicated that by 2010 Utah County will see a 16 percent increase in population to 527,302; Summit, a 22 percent increase to 44,511; and Wasatch, a 27 percent increase to 25,516. A combined projection of the 2000 Census data for all three counties for the year 2020 indicates the Mountainlands region will grow from a total of 413,487 to 763,402, an 85 percent increase.

The real estate market is expected to continue to recover from a period of correction, according to the National Association of Realtors. In the Mountainlands region, the median value of homes shows healthy increases relative to the 2000 U.S. Census.

The 2000 Census reported the median house value in Utah County



DOWNTOWN PROVO

to be \$156,000. Current estimates show an increase of approximately 18 percent to \$183,500. In Summit County, the median value of houses in 2000 was \$296,000. Current estimates show no change. In 2000, Wasatch County had a median house value of \$185,300. This has risen to \$214,000—a 15 percent increase.

The Mountainland region offers a strong contingent of young, healthy, educated workers. A Center for Disease Control survey over the years 2002-2004 determined that the general health score of Utah County residents, on a 1 to 5 rating, is 3.7. In Summit County, residents score 4.1. In part because the area is home to two major universities, BYU and Utah Valley University, the median age for Utah County is a remarkably young 23.3 years. The figure for Summit County, which features a number of ski resorts, sits at around 33 years.

MAKING LIFE LIVABLE

The main attraction of the Mountainland region is truly in its namesake—the Wasatch Mountains. The bustling Provo-Orem community, known for its suburban lifestyle and high-tech ventures, deftly blends with the resort communities of Wasatch and Summit counties.

A short, scenic drive up Provo Canyon will lead first to Heber Valley, the Wasatch County seat and home to various outdoor activities and Olympic venues. The road itself winds along the Provo River, a blue ribbon fly fishery fed by melting snow of the Uinta and Wasatch mountains. Heber City lies along the Provo between two of the state's most well-known reservoirs, Jordanelle and Deer Creek, which—along with the irrigation water they provide—are also a summer mecca for boating and fishing enthusiasts.

Heber Valley enjoys a much slower pace than that of the Wasatch Front, and community officials are currently trying to find balance between maintaining the rural, small-town feel with strategic growth decisions such as whether to allow big box stores and other commercial development.

Although the area is blanketed in snow during half of the year, provid-

ZERMATT RESORT



ing a perfect venue for cross country skiing, snowmobiling and other winter activities, the valley greens up to offer plentiful biking, hiking, golfing and fishing during the summer and autumn months. Employment in the area is still led by hospitality-related operations. The recent opening of Zermatt Resort, a high-quality spa that caters to business gatherings and conferences, helps solidify this position.

A 20-minute drive through the Wasatch Mountains eventually wraps back around to popular destinations such as Park City and Deer Valley, making the quaint Heber Valley just a stone's throw from many of the state's most affluent resorts and neighborhoods.

NOT QUITE LIKE THE OTHERS

Summit County boasts three of the world's finest winter sports parks, with a total of 9,000 acres for skiing, snowboarding, sledding and sleigh-riding. The Park City Mountain Resort, The Canyons and Deer Valley Resort have spent millions of dollars in improvements to lifts, trails and additions to lodging. Fine retail shops, restaurants, and an outdoor amphitheater featuring year-round live music are some of the other amenities.

Combined with the quaint Old Town Main Street, central to Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival, the resort communities cater to a crowd of the upper echelon, while still maintaining accessibility to locals in Salt Lake and Provo.

Dana Williams is mayor of Park City, the principal city in Summit County. "We're 95 percent built out," Williams says, "so we have relatively large redevelopment projects."

Although the town has year-round residency of 8,500, the number in

town on any day in season, can swell to 30,000. Forty percent of residents are in service-related jobs. "Three years ago, we started a community dialogue on sustainability, i.e. how could we sustain this city in terms of open space and housing for workers," Williams says. The result of the discussions was that new ordinances were passed requiring developers to build affordable housing—most of which is done as infill into existing neighborhoods.

Residents in Summit County also tend to be ambitious about protecting the land and open space that drew them to the area in the first place. While the county has seen considerable commercial development in recent years, including a popular outlet retail center, Williams says Park City has approved bond issues totaling \$40 million to purchase open spaces that are permanently protected from development.

"We were the first U.S. city to approve the Kyoto Accord—protecting the environment," Williams says. "We've also converted all our city vehicles to bio-diesel fuel. After all, our economy is based on the weather and we want to be sure we still have snow."

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